

## **mal-dis-tri-bu-tion**

*n.* Faulty distribution or apportionment, as of resources, over an area or among a group.

Maldistribution is a term generally applied to economic disparity: It most often refers to the unequal distribution of resources or capital.

It is a term that also suggests 'bad' distribution- a common complaint of producers of cultural artifacts: records, films, mass-produced objects. In this context, it refers to a lack of wide commercial availability of a specific product, usually through the fault of the distributor. Maldistribution has poor consequences for mass-produced objects and good consequences for their opposite in the realm of distribution: objects of art.

A work of art actually benefits from lack of accessibility, from 'bad distribution'. Its rarity is the source of much of its value. The editioned print or photograph, the one-of-a-kind painting, the small-print-run book are all infused with value through scarcity. Simultaneous with scarcity, publicity plays a vital role in the value equation: the work must be visible through publicity, reproduction, and discourse while remaining physically inaccessible. Through the combination of publicity and scarcity, the work of art's physical existence is charged with value in a process dialectically opposed to that of the mass-produced object.

This is a collection of objects which have been repurposed in ways that generate ambiguity or friction within the continuum of intention and reception. The complex interactions between the roles of producer and distributor of mass-cultural artifacts in creating and reframing meaning inform the 'afterlives' of these objects- the ways in which they are processed and used exceed the scope of their original intent, and contradictory effects ensue when an object's original meaning-value is unhinged.

The complexity of these effects is similar to that of the 'use' of art upon reception by the art viewer and provides some insight into contemporary art making, distribution, and reception. Increasing difficulty and complexity in determining a static author of a show or an artwork and questions regarding artistic identity, autonomy, and artistic license are all outgrowths of these same effects.

Examples of the phenomenon of 'repackaging' -with the term expanded to include censorship and withdrawal from distribution of works, retooling existing works to maximize commercial opportunity, counterfeiting, and the manipulation of financial markets- are juxtaposed with examples of mimicry, dissimulation, and Trojan Horses. The resulting objects become articles of 'bad faith' in relation to their original intent within the culture: an American distributors' repackaging and alteration of Jean Pierre Melville's masterpiece *Le Samorai* into the subpar *The Godson* through dubbing and repackaging in an attempt to capitalize on the success of *The Godfather* and (the film's star) Alain Delon's trial for murder; a distributor's non-sensical attempt to repress references to LSD in the marketing of the entirely LSD-themed film *The Trip*; the secret inclusion and reattribution on a Beach Boys album of a song written by Charles Manson; the manipulation of the BATS Index, a financial market, to create 'drawings' on the

charts; the Stuxnet virus, a Trojan Horse regarded as the first piece of 'war software' -not so different from Linda Benglis' sexually explicit ad in Artforum magazine which led to the resignation of several editors and creation of October magazine; and the Chinese counterfeiting of the never-produced Nike 'Heaven's Gate' SB Dunk shoes -suppressed prior to release when a media storm ensued regarding the stylistic relationship of the shoes to the Heaven's Gate cult suicide.

The counterfeit presupposes not only the existence but the value of the original- it is useless to counterfeit the worthless. The question of value here supersedes the seemingly a priori question of existence. The 'afterlives' of these objects presuppose and incorporate their original uses, sometimes resolving their internal contradictions, more often leading to a state of ambiguity and suspended animation: the objects' are 'value-added' through misuse.

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UPCOMING FALL 2011: Maldistribution II at Fellows of Contemporary Art, Chinatown